

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 002437

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SUBJECT: COMMERCIAL FARMERS' LEADERSHIP IS THE VICTIM OF
DEEP PHILOSOPHICAL DIVISIONS

Classified By: Labor officer Karen Bel for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) Summary: Both Colin Cloete, President, and David Hasluck, Director, of the Commercial Farmers' Union (CFU) tendered their resignations on October 29 at the CFU's national council meeting. These resignations, both of which are effective within thirty days, highlight broad gulfs -- between those remaining on their farms and those completely dispossessed, between those who favor dialogue with the GOZ and those who favor confrontation, between those who believe they have a future alongside ZANU-PF and those who advocate for a wholesale political change. Part of the pressure which resulted in these resignations was instigated by inflammatory press reports of the two leaders' meeting with an informal delegation of visiting Americans headed by NY Councilman Charles Barron. Deputy Director Dr. Jerry Grant has also resigned, leaving Vice President Doug Taylor-Freeme -- who is more disposed to confrontation with the GOZ -- in charge until a new president and director are chosen on November 26.

However, with as few as 600 commercial farmers (of whom 400 are currently under either Section 5 preliminary notice or Section 8 final notice of acquisition) from a previous high of 4,500 commercial farmers remaining on their land, this latest fracture in solidarity may well signal the complete demise of commercial farmers as an effective and cohesive group. End summary.

Internal Conflicts Brewing

¶12. (SBU) Colin Cloete, who was elected President in 2001, has been one of the prime advocates maintaining dialogue with the ZANU-PF GOZ. Although he has experienced continued pressure from settlers and local land committee officials on his own farm in the Norton area, Cloete has continued to express hope that the GOZ would recognize that white Zimbabwean commercial farmers have a valuable role to play in Zimbabwe's economic recovery. David Hasluck, who has been Director since 1984, is also an advocate for dialogue with the GOZ. Hasluck remains on his farm, and is currently proceeding with a tobacco crop despite the presence of settlers on his land. Both men believe that "when things come right," Zimbabwe will need commercial farmers in order to re-create food security as well as a viable economy.

¶13. (SBU) The CFU has been subjected to multiple pressures during the past six months. The first wave of Section 8 final acquisition orders "matured" in August, and thousands of farmers were forced off their land by settlers, land committee members, ZANU-PF beneficiaries, and war veteran groups. At the same time, some commercial farmers formed Justice for Agriculture (JAG), a hardline advocacy group which claimed a mandate to publicize the plight of commercial farmers, dispossessed farm workers, and agro-businesses, all of which are suffering under the chaotic land reform program. JAG encouraged farmers to keep their title deeds, resist attempts to subdivide their land, and challenge the GOZ in court wherever possible. In September, the CFU suspended regional officer Ben Freeth for taking a "confrontational" approach towards the government after he denounced the GOZ in a prayer at a CFU meeting. Many of the remaining CFU members were incensed that Freeth was suspended for speaking what many of them privately believed.

Blindsided by the GOZ-controlled Press

¶14. (C) However, the final nail in the coffin was apparently Hasluck's statement -- taken out of context and published in the GOZ-controlled press -- in which he reportedly unleashed a "surprise onslaught" blaming Britain for a diplomatic standoff with Harare, resulting in commercial farmers failing to receive compensation for their land. Hasluck admits making statements about Britain in the Barron meeting, but he claims that his statements were made in response to direct and specific questions and did not take the form of an "onslaught" against anybody. Post had contacted the CFU in

order to facilitate a meeting with the Barron entourage (which was in Zimbabwe at the invitation of the GOZ) after Barron stated that his group wanted to get "the other side of the story," only to be told that the GOZ had already arranged a meeting. When Barron's group arrived at the CFU offices -- apparently now perceived as a "legitimate" fact-finding mission due to Post's request -- it had grown to include several prominent ZANU-PF journalists. In retrospect, the CFU should have set the usual ground rules for the participation of the press. Despite doubts as to the group's intentions, however, Hasluck and Cloete voiced the CFU's position. Their worst fears were realized when a distorted version of the meeting made the front page of the following day's Herald, with a picture of the Americans seated with the two commercial farmers, alongside reports that Hasluck was now joining Mugabe in blaming Britain for all of Zimbabwe's troubles.

Comment

15. (C) This situation highlights the risks which Embassy contacts face when they agree to meet with unofficial delegations, particularly those that have some degree of solidarity with Mugabe's regime. The Barron delegation also attempted to bring an expanded group in to meet with several other Zimbabwean interlocutors unsympathetic toward the GOZ, and could have faced the same press treatment. However, these individuals were sufficiently wary that they refused to allow ZANU-PF press participation. Regardless, in the case of Amani Trust, the Barron delegation apparently leaked accusations about international funding of Amani to the GOZ press afterwards, and this information featured prominently in subsequent press attempts to cast Amani as a "western imperialist puppet" organization. As long as visiting American groups -- either knowingly or unwittingly -- are subject to exploitation and manipulation by the GOZ, it may be prudent to limit USG support for future unofficial trips.

16. (C) In the case of the CFU, it is unlikely that Hasluck made the statements attributed to him in the manner reported, but truth is less important than perception in the highly-charged environment of Zimbabwe. The alleged Hasluck "onslaught" against Britain neatly parrots the current ZANU-PF anti-British rhetoric and exploited pre-existing rifts in the dwindling ranks of the beleaguered CFU. Unfortunately, the CFU has now lost three of the few moderate voices in its leadership, and another potential source of civic debate and civic action has been silenced.

SULLIVAN